

Dietary Fiber

What is dietary fiber? - Dietary fiber is a plant component that is sometimes called “roughage” or “bulk”. It is a type of carbohydrate but, unlike other carbs, it isn’t easily digested, so it will pass through the intestinal tract mostly intact. Dietary fiber does a lot of good things for the body, and it is considered “**a nutrient we need to get more of.**”

Where do we find Dietary Fiber - Naturally occurring fiber is found in plant-based foods, including whole grains, fruits & vegetables; beans; nuts & seeds. Animal foods (red meat, poultry, fish, eggs & dairy) **DO NOT** contain dietary fiber.

What are the nutrition guidelines? – Most Americans don’t get the recommended amount of dietary fiber. Therefore, it is considered a “*nutrient of public concern*”. *The Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommend consuming a variety of foods each day that are good sources of dietary fiber, as well as making at least ½ the grains you eat, whole grains. **The overall general recommendation for healthy adults is to consume roughly 25-30 grams of fiber EACH DAY.** (Examples - 1 cup raspberries = 8 grams; 1 cup broccoli = 5 grams; 1 medium baked potato w/ skin = 4 grams; 1 slice whole wheat bread = 2 grams).

Why is dietary fiber important? – There are 2 types of dietary fiber: **Soluble Fiber** and **Insoluble Fiber**. **Soluble fiber acts like a SPONGE.** It dissolves water & forms a thick gel-like substance. Soluble fiber can help lower LDL or “bad” cholesterol levels in the blood. It also helps slow down digestion and that helps in better blood glucose or “blood sugar” control if diabetic.

Insoluble fiber acts like a BROOM. It speeds up the passage of food through the digestive system. This helps maintain regularity & prevent constipation. It also increases fecal bulk, making stools easier to pass.

Meals on Wheels – Each of our meals meet at least 1/3 of the Daily Recommended Dietary Allowance for the population we serve. On average, our meals contain ~ 8 grams of fiber. The meals are designed to provide fruit at least 3 times each week; 1-2 ½ cup servings of vegetables daily; a minimum of 1 high fiber vegetable served weekly; and a daily enriched, whole grain, or high fiber bread that provides at least 1 gram of dietary fiber per ounce.

Recommendations:

- Increasing fiber too quickly can cause abdominal cramping, bloating and gas, so increase your intake slowly. Add in 5 grams at a time every few days until you reach ~ 30 grams per day. Don’t forget to drink plenty of fluids, 8-10 cups per day, to keep all that bulk moving.
- Make at least HALF of your grains WHOLE. Read food labels and choose foods with a whole grain ingredient listed first on the ingredient list. A whole grain cannot be identified by COLOR. The best indicator is the INGREDIENTS list.
- Fill 1/2 your meal plates with fruits and vegetables; Start your day with a bowl of whole grain cereal and top it with fruit; Choose plant protein foods more often like beans, nuts, and seeds, in place of meat; Eat more whole grains like oatmeal, whole wheat bread and pasta, bran cereal, air popped popcorn, brown rice, quinoa, corn, etc.
- Use the **Nutrition Facts Label** on your food package as a tool to increase dietary fiber. If the label states 3 grams of fiber per serving, a serving of that food is a GOOD SOURCE of fiber; If the Label states 5 grams or more per serving, a serving of that food is an EXCELLENT source of fiber
- Choose whole fruit (fresh, frozen, dried, and canned in 100% juice) as snacks and desserts or add them to salads and side dishes. Keep rinsed & cut vegetables handy for quick snacks.

If you have a question about dietary fiber or the *Meals on Wheels*, contact our Nutritionist for guidance.

Source: *Interactive Nutrition Facts Label; Dietary Fiber.* March 2020. U.S. Food & Drug Administration. www.fda.gov/nutritioneducation

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